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ABSTRACT

Stories of personal experience of supernatural events are a highly-valued form of verbal art for Cherokee speakers. Both the people who tell them and those who listen regard such stories as entertaining and instructional. These stories even reflect some of the tensions that exist between traditional Cherokee culture and modern American social life, and they provide linguists with valuable examples of "good" Cherokee language as it is used by speakers. Cherokee stories of the supernatural are distinguished from other Cherokee stories by their subject matter, style, and the circumstances surrounding their telling; good stories are told with a minimum of verbal response from the audience. Speakers dislike being interrupted, so they very skillfully exploit the resources of the language to avoid ambiguity and keep audience interest. Good stories of the supernatural provide examples of carefully-structured, rhetorically-sophisticated, and highly-regarded Cherokee speech, often with meanings related to contemporary life, morals, and values. Literary art in Cherokee is still being created today and reflects the modern life of the Cherokee using this more traditional means of cultural communication. (Contains 22 references.) (Author/NAV)

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CHEROKEE STORIES OF THE SUPERNATURAL

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Abstract: Stories of personal experiences of supernatural events are a highly-valued form of verbal art for Cherokee speakers today. Both the people who tell them and those who listen regard such stories as entertaining and instructional. The stories reflect some of the tensions that exist between traditional Cherokee culture and modern American social life. They also provide linguists with valuable examples of "good Cherokee" as it is used by speakers.

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1. Introduction

Stories of personal experiences with the supernatural constitute an important verbal art form for contemporary speakers of the Cherokee language.[1] These stories are distinguished from other stories and other kinds of verbal art by their subject matter, their style, and the circumstances surrounding their telling.

This essay is intended as a contribution to the study of oral literary traditions, specifically the traditions of the Cherokees. It is a response to calls from many scholars, including Bright (1984), for studies of oral narratives and literary traditions in American Indian societies; specific studies of this sort are prerequisite to the broader understanding of the full spectrum of oral and written literary traditions across the globe.

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The oral narratives that are discussed here belong to a rich tradition of verbal artistry in the Cherokee language among culturally conservative Cherokees. This tradition survives to this day and includes both written and oral material. Although the Cherokees use writing for both sacred and secular purposes, written literature in Cherokee is associated with the sacred. The New Testament and part of the Old Testament are widely available in Cherokee. There are also numerous collections of medical formulas and prayers, some still kept private and secret. Many of these prayers are highly formal in structure. They are discussed at length in works by Mooney (1891, 1932) and Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick (1965, 1967, 1970).

The strictly oral tradition of the Cherokees includes among other things narratives of various kinds. Studies of this oral tradition have tended to focus

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on traditional myths and legends, with an emphasis on content rather than form that has followed naturally from scholars' interest in gleaning information about early history and culture from the stories and comparing the themes and plots of narratives across cultures. Traditional oral narratives appear in the original Cherokee in Speck 1926, Olbrechts 1931, and King 1975.[2] In addition, several traditional stories were edited by Laura King and published in the Journal of Cherokee Studies in the 1970s. However, the largest and best-known collection of traditional narratives, Mooney 1900, is entirely in English. Two other important collections of Cherokee stories in English translation were prepared by Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick (1964, 1966): these include a range of narratives and anecdotes under the rubrics of folklore and folktales. One study that does not focus solely on content is Singleton's (1979) pilot study of Cherokee narrative structure, which applies Robert Longacre's theories to a small corpus of Cherokee-language narratives.

My research on Cherokee narratives and literary traditions draws on the literature discussed above and on field work conducted from 1984 through 1994 with Cherokee speakers in California and Oklahoma. Among the Cherokee-language narrative texts that I have recorded are seven well-told stories of personal experiences with the supernatural.

2. Characteristics of Stories of the Supernatural

In this essay I argue that there is an important Cherokee cultural category of stories of personal experience with the supernatural, and that some of the stories, which I discuss here, should be recognized as examples of verbal art. In this section I examine these stories in terms of their content and the contexts in which they are told and in terms of their relationships to other kinds of narratives, and I discuss their literary value.

Stories of Amazing Events. The kind of stories I describe here have to do with happenings that are u:sgwanikdi 'amazing'.[3] In these stories, people describe their involvement with events that defy ordinary expectations, and that cannot be explained in terms of the usual activities of human beings or animals. Such a story typically evokes some element of the spirit world: a prototypical story of something that is u:sgwanikdi is a story about a vision, a strange dream, or an experience with traditional medicine, or with the Little People or some other spirit creature (see Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick 1964, Mooney 1900). One story that I recorded, called by the narrator, "When the Ghost Drove Up In the Car", provides a good example. The story tells of a car that drove up to a house in the country one night, with its lights on. The people who were in the house saw the car, as did the people next door. The car doors slammed, but no one

ever came to the door of either house, and the next time anyone looked out, the car was gone without having made any noise. The next morning, there were no tire tracks to be found.

These stories are typically told to small audiences, often in the context of several people taking turns telling stories of a similar nature. In addition to describing their experiences, people may also tell stories about what they have been told about the supernatural--in one story that I recorded, "The Little People", a woman describes the advice she got from neighbors about placating the Little People after she had moved a mobile home onto a plot of land.[4]

Occasions for telling these kinds of stories frequently arise or are created, and it is very easy to elicit these stories in English or in Cherokee. This may be because Cherokees perceive these stories as typical of the stories that they tell, and because the stories are regarded as both instructional and entertaining.

The stories are instructional in that they help to explain what it means to be a Cherokee. These stories describe events that have happened to Cherokee people, and although the events are u:sgwanikdi, they are representative of the kinds of events that Cherokees may expect other Cherokees to experience. In addition, the stories include vivid expressions of conflicts between the ways of conservative Cherokees and the ways of contemporary American life. For example, the story of the mysterious car involves the highly unusual event of a car appearing at night in a rural Cherokee community in about 1940. The events occur on a Saturday night when the men of the house are at church and the women have stayed home, "too lazy to go to the service", as the narrator explained to me. "The Little People" involves a young Cherokee couple who have set up a mobile home on a lot in a conservative community where they plan to build a house. Another story told by a traditional Cherokee doctor or medicine man describes a dream he had as a teenager. At the beginning of the story, his father comes home drunk, and gives the boy some whisky to drink to help cure him of a cold. Later the boy falls asleep and dreams that he is lying on what seems to be an operating table, with people moving human bones across his body. They move the bones over to his right side, and he wakes up in the morning with a terrible pain on his right side.

Cherokee audiences find the stories entertaining, but not particularly funny or frightening. Their value as entertainment arises from the unusual events that are described, from the verbal skill of the teller who evokes an atmosphere and creates suspense, and from the pleasure of participating in an exchange of tales. The stories need not be novel to be appreciated; people are known for their stories, and particular favorites may be requested.

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Traditional narratives may be said to have narrators but not authors. In contrast, the stories of personal experience that I discuss here do have authors--the people who experienced the events and have chosen to tell about them; and in a sense the stories are the property of their authors. People seem to feel that they are not entitled to repeat other people's stories. People will tell about what has happened to others in a highly abbreviated fashion, but no matter how well they know the stories or the other tellers, and even with liberal use of markers of hearsay, they will not tell those events as stories, with detailed descriptions and characterizations, dialogue, and commentary. When I asked one speaker whether I could record her telling a particular story, she replied that I could, because it was her story. Other people had experienced those particular events with her, and they too could tell the story if they wanted, but in their own ways.

Cherokee speakers are very concerned with other people's judgments of their knowledge and use of the language and their status as storytellers. Certain people have reputations as good story tellers and good speakers, or reputations for telling particular good stories. Stories of amazing events, like the ones I describe here, provide extended examples of what Cherokee speakers consider good contemporary usage of their language.[5]

The best of these stories are told in what amount to performances: they have been carefully crafted in telling after telling as speakers have worked to achieve particular rhetorical effects. These highly polished stories are told much the same way from one occasion to the next, whether in Cherokee or in English translation. False starts and hesitations are much less common in these stories than in ordinary conversation or in the anecdotes that are told in the course of ordinary conversation. Interruptions and comments are out of place during the telling of a story, and after a story is finished, speakers have little patience for listeners who ask questions about details of the events or characters that have been described.

Characterizing the Stories. Among the different kinds of Cherokee narratives that I have studied are traditional stories and myths, and stories of personal experience including reminiscences, humorous anecdotes, and accounts of recent events, as well as experiences with the supernatural.

All well-told Cherokee narratives have certain things in common, some of which are illustrated in the example passages given below. If stories involve more than one character, they include a good deal of direct quotation. Certain words and clitics are used to mark topics, contrast, emphasis, and boundaries between episodes. A range of different syntactic constructions is used, and the order of sentence constituents is manipulated to reflect the importance of

particular pieces of information (see Scancarelli 1987:172-98). Also, the complex derivational morphology of Cherokee is exploited by good story-tellers, many of whom have reputations for having large vocabularies and being able to express complex ideas in single words.

Well-told stories of amazing events are carefully structured, with abundant and effective use of repetition, doubling, and parallel structures of various sorts. In "The Little People", two elderly neighbors come to tell the narrator that she and her husband have disturbed the Little People by setting up a mobile home. An excerpt from this story appears as (1).[6]

(1) [1]Ge:sd o:sd yu:ye:lv:se, adeloho:hisd ge:hv gu:sd u:dehtohdi:sga.

[2]"He:sdhnv yitsgwango:se:sd u:wakdi:di:sv, gu:sd ihadeloho:sv:hnv. [3]Yv:w ju:nsdihen u:ninv:hnv ihna aye:hl tsdi:di:g di:sde:nv:sv:'i," s:gino:he:lv:he.

[4]"Nu:sdvhn a:ne:ha, du:nindihwsido:lv go:hi:d sgihnv de:hi:sdu:hvsi. [5]Hla yu:sgwanikde:sd gu:sd i:hade:loho:sv:hnv:'i," a:'wo:he:lvhen sginana u:tvhisd.

[6]Hlasgu ta'lu jusv:hihd yige:se no:le na' Galo:nvsg ju:luhjvsgwu--uhlo:y na:giwe:he:li:hlv.

[7]"He:shnv jihisgwango:si. [8]Hla yu:da:lu:l, tade:lohosv:hn, tata:'vnvhn. [9]Ase:hn sguhe:n ge:he:sdi [10]Sudale:'eyo yinjadv:ne:l, hla' dli:ya yidage:jadehtohtan.

[11]"Sdi:yu gu:sd u:ti'ido:lv ga:du'iyig, hyitlahvsg ilvhdlv, sgina ya:nahlsde:hldohd. [12]Gv:waktu nu:nahlsdahne:hv:n yig, hla' gu:sd yidage:jadehtohtan. [13]V:sgu niga'e:sd u:nahlsdahyd a:nihwahti:he:sdi," a:'wo:he:lv:hnv.

[1]His mind was uneasy, it was clear that he was troubled.

[2]"Don't be surprised in the days to come, if you should see or hear things. [3]The Little People have a trail there, right in the middle of where you've placed your house," he said to us.

[4]"They live a certain way, you've cut off the place where they've crossed back and forth for a long time. [5]It shouldn't be a surprise for you to see and hear things," the old man said to me.

[6]Not even two nights went by and then Emma came too--she came to say the same thing to me.

[7]"Don't be surprised. [8]Without fail, you'll notice things, you'll hear things. [9]But it will only be them. [10]But if you will do just one thing, they won't bother you very much.

[11]"If you set out somewhere a little bit of leftovers, like bread, that would be of help to them. [12]As long as they don't

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have to do without, they won't bother you at all. [13]As long as they can find something to eat," she said to me.

First, an old man comes to give them a warning. He is described as troubled, twice (see sentence 1). His warning, reported as direct speech, is chiastic in structure: he tells them to expect odd happenings, he tells them about the Little People, and then he repeats himself, telling about the Little People and telling the couple to expect odd things (see sentences 2 through 5). Then comes a repetition of the warning from the man's wife (see sentences 7 through 13). Her speech itself contains several kinds of repetition. She warns them to expect odd things, first speaking more generally of "noticing" things and then more specifically of "hearing" things (sentence 8). Unlike her husband, she offers a suggestion for avoiding trouble (see sentences 10 through 13), which includes several repetitive elements. In this example, and generally in the stories I have recorded, the second repetition usually expands upon the information given earlier.

Some examples of repetition in stories of the supernatural involve the Cherokee "magic numbers" four and seven, which can come into play in long narratives. One speaker, a practitioner of traditional Cherokee medicine, told about a strange experience he had as a young man. He was doing agricultural labor, working far from his home. He and a friend went to buy some liquor from a bootlegger, and on the way back to town they got tired and went to sleep by the side of the road. An excerpt from the story appears as (2).

(2) [1]No:gwuhn a:se sana:le no:gw di:dl ge:se. [2]Jida:gahno ana:yv:hlsgv, a:kwtvga:nv.

[3]No:gwule gohu:sd no:gw, jidodi:tltade:go jine:ji gadu di:dl nv:wasdv nagwalisda:ne:hv.

[4]Kohi:yu no:gw, sdi:kid da:gwakahnan. [5]Go:sdihno, a:ginegudi:sgv, eli:sdi. [6]Gi:hli jige:so iyu:sd a:danhte:hdi ge:sv. [7]No:gwuhno ji:sga'gwu. [8]Ido:hno to:' nadv:neho hle:g.

[9]Nolehn si:gwu tohi'ahlsdade:go e:li:sdi, jineji'en di:dl. [10]Kohi:yu no:gwu di:sgwi:nv gvnhdi deji:sgwadv:niho. [11]"Hisu:ligo'i! [12]Hada'nv:na!" ji:yose:ho. [13]Ido:hno to:' nadv:neho.

[14]Wakto:gw, o:hni no:gw, u:si:ne:n, no:gw o:sda a:gwahltlodv:nv iyu:sd, o:sd agwanse:hnv. [15]"Ta'line dodi'alistade:sa o:sda daji:niyv:hi a: ilvtlv widajihda'e:si," agwe:li:sv.

[16]Ido:hno, dojulistadi:n, o:sdahno jiniyv:ha--a:se hla yvgagada nijiyvne:lv jini:yvhv ase:hno jiniyv:hv. [17]No:gwuhno o:sda a:gwahlsdahyvtan--no:gwu nidvsalidanv iyu:sdi

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nagwadv:nelv, ilvtlv wijida'inv:sv [18]"'Hisuligo'i!' jigv:yosi," ji:yose:lv.

[19]Udo:yu vsgwu u:suligo:jvhe:n.

[1]Then it must have been morning. [2]I heard the chickens crowing.

[3]And then it seemed to me there was something, that was jumping on top of my chest.

[4]After a while, I kind of opened my eyes a little bit and looked. [5]There was something, it was picking on me, I thought. [6]It seemed like it was a dog. [7]And then I scolded him. [8]And sure enough he stopped for a while.

[9]And then it seemed like he jumped up again, toward my chest. [10]After a while I began to hit him in the side with my fist. [11]"Quit it! [12]Get away!" I kept telling him. [13]And sure enough he stopped for a while.

[14]And then he kept on, and then, when he backed up again, then I lay down good, I lay down on my back. [15]"The next time he jumps on me I'm going to get a good hold on him and I'm going to throw him off somewhere," I thought.

[16]And sure enough, when he jumped up, I caught him good--and I can't say just how I got a grip on him to catch him but I did catch him. [17]And then I braced myself real good--and I raised up like, and I threw him off somewhere. [18]"Quit it!' I told you," I said to him.

[19]And he sure stopped then.

The narrator was awakened at dawn by something like a dog that was jumping on him. This is the central, climactic event of the story. The dog-like creature jumps up on the narrator four times (sentences 3, 9, 14, and 16), and is subdued only after the fourth jump (sentences 16 through 19). At the end of the story we learn that eventually the narrator consulted a fortune teller who told him that his overcoming the attack meant that he would be successful in using traditional Cherokee medicine.

Stories of amazing events are distinguished from other stories by characteristics that are associated with their subject matter. To a much greater extent than other stories, these stories leave the interpretation or conclusion up to the listener. They often include explicit statements of uncertainty from the speaker, who may admit to not knowing how to interpret the unusual events or what caused them. For example, in a later passage in the story cited in (2), we learn that the narrator thought long and hard about his strange experience before consulting the fortune teller.

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In telling "When the Ghost Drove Up In the Car", the speaker closes the story by musing over the things she saw and heard (part of the conclusion of the story appears as (3)).

(3) [1]Doyu se:g nu:hlsdanv--hlahn ogv:s yo:gi:gohe
[2]Adamobi:lihn ani:sohen aniyo:ne:g, sgwu u:nigo:hv.
[3]Hla do:yu yo:jvtsgo:nsg udo:yu o:gigo:hv--ase:hn ahna wu:lo:sv, hla ilv:hiyu yo:gv:nt. [4]Sgigwu:hn nike:sv, u:sgwanikd nu:hlsdanv.
[5]Kohihn jig gado:sgin geli:sgo, lv:hiyu kv:hn nulsdanv:n jige:hv adamobi:l, gagwuke ge:se, e:hlawe:k u:ni:hv:sen, gado:hvn ahna indu:lasgvn ge:hv adamobi:l.
[6]Sgi a:kse:giyoche:ho--niga:da ogi:segiyo:che:hv, ase:hn wunvkta:hno hla ya:ne:ho--e:hlogi oginv:sv o:sde, v:sg ogini:go:hv, si o:sdihnohe:sgo yv:da:hv.
[7]Sihn ogindu:li:sgo ogindelo'ohisdi ahna na wu:losv.
[8]"Hald gado u:sdihn ge:he, ga:gwusgin ge:he, sgiligwuke ge:se," o:sdadi:sgo.

[1]A very strange thing happened--and we [the speaker, her aunt, and her grandmother] were not the only ones to see it.
[2]Those others, white people, saw the car too.
[3]We really didn't lie, we really saw it--and where it went, we never knew. [4]And that was an amazing thing to happen.
[5]Even now I wonder, why the car was never seen, and who it was, who moved it without us hearing it, and why there were no car tracks.
[6]That puzzles me--it puzzled all of us, but the rest of them are dead--my aunt and I are the only ones living that saw it, and sometimes we still talk about it.
[7]And we still would like to find out where it went. [8]"I wonder what it was, or who it was, or was it just a ghost," we say.

This passage includes several interesting examples of repetition. The second paragraph (sentences 3 and 4) is an inversion of the first (sentences 1 and 2): the first paragraph begins with an assertion that something strange had happened, and ends with an attestation to the truth of the strange story; the second paragraph begins with an attestation to the truth of the story and ends with an assertion that something strange had occurred. This excerpt also illustrates parallelism in lexis and syntax. For example, the verb "puzzle" is repeated in sentence 6, and the series of questions in sentence 8 not shows

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parallel structure within the sentence and also recalls the wording and structure of sentence 5.

In stories about supernatural events characters and settings are typically described in much greater detail than in other stories. For example, in the first two sentences of the story in (2), the story teller not only tells us that it was morning, but tells us how he knows that. Details about time, place, and characters are often absent in traditional narratives because the details are either irrelevant, or unknown, or so well-known that they can be omitted. But stories of amazing events do not draw on stock characters and settings to the same extent as myths or anecdotes. Details are more important in these personal experience stories than in others at least in part because of the subject matter: the details emphasize the contrast between the ordinary and amazing events in the story, and they establish the truth of the story and the credibility of the narrator. Careful description of places suggests that the narrator is a good observer; if places are familiar to the listeners, the suspense of the story is compounded by the combination of unusual events with commonplace surroundings. Facts about other characters in the stories are especially important when those people are witnesses to the amazing events that are described. In the story in (2), we learn later that the narrator's companion is aware of the attack from the dog--this establishes that the attack was not simply a dream. The companion is introduced early in the story, and details are provided about the friends' conversations and activities that evening. In "When the Ghost Drove Up In the Car", the narrator's aunt and grandmother, and the couple living next door are witnesses to the car's having been there.

Most traditional stories and most short anecdotes focus on conflicts between two characters or a fairly straightforward sequence of events. Those stories tend to emphasize events and circumstances rather than mental states. In contrast, an important focus of amazing stories is often an internal conflict within the mind of the speaker, or speculation as to the mental state of a character. The examples above include numerous references to mental states. This is especially evident in (3), where the entire passage consists of the story teller's reflections. Mental states also figure prominently in (1) as the story teller describes the old man's state of mind (sentence 1), and both the old man and his wife tell the young couple not to be "surprised" by things that occur (sentences 2, 5, and 7). In the story in (2), the story teller describes his thoughts as well as his actions when the dog attacks him (sentences 3, 5, 6, and 15).

With any story of personal experience, as opposed to a traditional story or myth, the story teller cannot appeal to authority that justifies telling the tale in a particular way, or indeed telling the story at all. It is not possible for

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speakers to say, for example, "This is how they told it long ago", or to tell the story as if assuming that the events in the story are inherently interesting to the audience. And unlike humorous anecdotes, stories of amazing events do not justify themselves by their clear amusement value. Rather, these stories' worth in terms of form and content must be clearly established, implicitly or explicitly, by the speaker. As a result, the narratives exhibit an exceptionally large number and wide range of evaluative devices (see Labov 1972). Among these are the use of tone of voice, markers of emphasis, repetitions, relative clauses, negatives, rhetorical questions, exclamations, direct quotations, expressions of uncertainty, and references to mental states, some of which are evident in the passages quoted above.

Perhaps the most prominent of these are repetition and references to mental states, discussed above. Also noteworthy is the use of markers of negation (typically with a form of hla 'not') and uncertainty (such as a:se 'perhaps, maybe' or indefinite pronouns), which highlight the unusual, unexpected nature of the events being described. In the excerpt in (1), explicit negative morphology occurs in sentences 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 12. In the excerpt in (2), full negation occurs only in sentence 16, but expressions of uncertainty occur in sentences 3, 5, 6, and 9. In the excerpt in (3), negation or uncertainty or both are expressed in sentences 1, 3, 5, and 8.

The Literary Character of Cherokee Stories of Supernatural Events. Bright (1984:133) suggests that "literature" refers to the "discourses or texts which, within any society, are considered worthy of dissemination, transmission, and preservation in essentially constant form." If we define "society" in such a way as to include a community or other segment of a larger society, then some Cherokee stories of personal experience with the supernatural must be classified as literary, for they are requested, told and retold in the same way on many occasions over periods of many years.

Labov (1972:396) has this to say in speaking of Black English Vernacular stories of personal experiences with fights:

> when they are quoted in the exact words of the speaker, they will command the total attention of an audience in a remarkable way, creating a deep and attentive silence that is never found in academic or political discussion. The reaction of listeners to these narratives seems to demonstrate that the most highly evaluated form of language is that which translates our personal experience into dramatic form.

Not surprisingly, the reactions Labov describes are similar to the reactions that Cherokee speakers have to the stories I have presented here.

Chafe (1982) identifies two sets of features that distinguish conversation from academic prose. One set, opposing fragmentation and integration, reflects the amount of information contained in "idea units"; the other set, opposing involvement and detachment, reflects the degree of involvement with the audience. Conversation is characterized by fragmentation and involvement; academic writing is characterized by integration and detachment. The characteristic features of Cherokee stories of amazing events reflect some integration and considerable involvement. Chafe (1982:52) suggests that oral literature--specifically ritual language--may be prototypically characterized by integration and detachment, noting that "the reciter of oral literature is, like a writer, detached from direct personal interaction". The features of involvement noted for these Cherokee stories follow from the fact that the story tellers are creating stories for their audiences, and not just reciting stories. The involvement reflected in these stories does not indicate that they are not literary, but rather that there is a distinction between traditional or ritual oral literature and contemporary oral literature.

I view these stories as examples of verbal performance art: they are dramatic in nature, just as Jacobs (1959) describes Clackamas myths as more similar to Western theater rather than to the short story or novel. Indeed, the best of these stories can be regarded as dramatic poetry, following Tedlock (1983).

These Cherokee stories are dramatic in that the structure of their plots can be seen in terms of acts and scenes, but more importantly, they are dramatic in the way that the storyteller uses his or her voice expressively, and uses voice and language to evoke the particulars of places and events. The language of the stories is poetic to the extent that the linguistic form carries important aesthetic content (cf. Bright 1984:134).[7] The repetition and parallelism in these stories contribute to their poetic quality.

Speakers' sensitivity to the aesthetic content of their stories is revealed not only in the text itself, but also in speakers' behavior with regard to the texts that they produce. In translating stories into English, a speaker's degree of concern with the phrasing of the English version correlates with the poetic quality of the original text. The speaker who recorded "The Little People" also recorded a story about a trip she took to Washington, D.C. The first story was highly structured, and had been told often; then second was an offhand account of a recent experience. In translating the first story into English, the speaker was very careful to consider the sound and flow of the English words, trying

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out various phrasings, repeating them several times, and rejecting some in favor of others which were more graceful. Her tone of voice was highly expressive, much the same in telling the English and Cherokee versions, and structures that were parallel in Cherokee were translated similarly in English. The English translation of the second story was much less carefully constructed.

The common technique of using spontaneous utterances as the basis for elicitation--asking speakers whether one or another word or construction could be substituted for the one used and asking what differences in meaning might result from the substitution--works differently with different kinds of utterances. I find this technique very easy to use with the utterances that arise in conversation or in brief anecdotes and other incidental stories, but I find it very difficult to use with utterances from the stories that I consider poetic. In working with me on transcribing stories from tape, speakers occasionally revise or edit the text, indicating that a particular phrase would be improved by making a change. But aside from these self-corrections, speakers hesitate to change the wording of those stories in any way, even with the understanding that the changed wording might not be appropriate for the original context. I believe that this hesitancy arises from the value that speakers attach to the linguistic form of the utterance, which would be compromised by changes.

3. Conclusion

Cherokee speakers consider stories of personal experience to be "good" only insofar as they appreciate both the content and form of the stories. Good stories are told with a minimum of verbal response from the audience. Speakers dislike having their stories interrupted; hence they must skillfully exploit the resources of the language to avoid unwanted ambiguity and to keep the audience's interest. Good stories of personal experience with the supernatural are practiced set pieces, and as such they provide examples of carefully structured, rhetorically sophisticated, highly-regarded speech.

Just as the content of traditional stories can reflect themes and ideas which are or have been of great importance to members of a culture, so can the content of contemporary stories of personal experience, like these stories of the supernatural. Each of the stories of experiences with the supernatural that I have recorded is clearly important to its teller. The stories reflect the conflicts that arise between traditional Indian and contemporary American beliefs, or between more spiritual or religious and more scientific expectations or outlooks. Thus a young couple's mobile home coexists with the Little People's trail. A young man is living far from home and drinking bootleg whisky, when he has a dream that portends his success as a traditional medicine man.

Women stay home instead of going to church, and a strange car, perhaps a symbol of modern white society, appears out of nowhere. These stories are clearly important to their audiences, who find considerable satisfaction in hearing them repeated. Indeed, repeated stories like these both reflect and create myth and culture.

So stories like these can be important for what they say about language use among the Cherokees and what counts as good Cherokee, for what they say about story-telling and its place in Cherokee culture, and also for what their content says about the conflicts inherent in contemporary Cherokee culture. But that is not all. Many of these stories are constant in form; occasions are created for them to be told. The stories can be regarded as polished, highly-valued, effective dramatic performances of verbal art. These stories have the characteristics of literature.

Studies of American Indian literature have increased greatly in number in recent years, but for the most part they remain limited in focus. Commonly, American Indian literature is regarded as consisting of traditional stories and rituals in an American Indian language, and contemporary novels and or poems in English. To be sure, scholars recognize that the traditional stories and rituals are often kept alive by contemporary speakers, who view them as important to their culture and who perform and may in some cases adapt the traditional texts. Still, the recent anthologies of American Indian literature and the recent collections of critical essays can suggest that American Indian cultures lack contemporary, creative, literary uses of American Indian languages--but that is not the case. Contemporary American Indian literature is not written only in English. Literary art in Cherokee and in other American Indian languages is still being created, and the oral literature of American Indians is not limited to religious rituals and traditional narratives.

NOTES

[1] Cherokee is a language of the Iroquoian family. There are several thousand Cherokee speakers, most of whom live in Oklahoma or North Carolina. My work on Cherokee has been conducted primarily with speakers of the Western dialect as it is spoken in Oklahoma. I am grateful to the Cherokee speakers who have allowed me to record and publish their stories, and to those who have worked with me on the material discussed here: Ginny Byrd Pittman, Virginia Carey, Martin Cochran, George Pumpkin, Anna

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[2] Speck 1926 and Olbrechts 1931 contain transcriptions of additional oral material as well.

[3] The Cherokee orthography used here is the same one used in Scancarelli (to appear). The symbol v̲ represents a nasalized mid central vowel; the apostrophe represents glottal stop; long vowels are marked with a colon; pitch is not marked. The orthography is similar to the orthography in Feeling (1975), but Feeling (a) uses the phonetic symbol [], rather than an apostrophe, for glottal stop, (b) marks short vowels in open syllables with an underdot, rather than marking long vowels, and (c) marks pitch with a system of superscripts.

[4] The full text of "The Little People" appears in Scancarelli (in preparation) in a more highly edited version.

[5] Fortunately, good speakers are often willing to have their speech recorded. It is possible to record poorly-told stories as well; they provide an interesting contrast to good ones. Here I restrict my attention to good stories.

[6] The example passages are presented first in Cherokee and then in English. The Cherokee transcription shows fairly casual pronunciation. The English translation is faithful to the translation provided by the speaker; the translation preserves the structure of the Cherokee where that does not compromise the sense of the English. Commas mark the ends of vocal phrases or lines, which are often clauses. They are signalled by intonational cues and short pauses. Periods mark the ends of units that can be characterized as sentences, signaled by syntax, intonational cues, and longer pauses. Sentences are numbered with superscripts. Dashes (--) mark places where two clauses, each with its own intonation contour, are run together without pause. Paragraphs are larger units, signaled by syntax, intonation, and long pauses.

[7] In claiming that some of these stories are poetic, I do not claim that they are told in verse. See Hymes (1981), Tedlock (1983), Bright (1984), and Mattina (1987) for perspectives on the relationship between verse and narrative.

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